

## Method

### Critical Elements

After the December 1997 meeting in Tucson, the Critical Elements Work Group reviewed relevant youth development literature and kept in mind the goals and vision of 4-H as they endeavored to create a list of program characteristics most likely to engender positive youth outcomes when incorporated into youth programming. The following is the list of the eight critical elements (*see Appendix B for the work group report*):

- A positive relationship with a caring adult;
- A physically and emotionally safe environment;
- The opportunity to value and practice service for others;
- An opportunity for self-determination;
- An inclusive environment;
- An opportunity to see oneself as an active participant in the future;
- Engagement in learning; and
- Opportunity for mastery.

The theoretical strength of these critical elements is the cornerstone of the National 4-H Impact Assessment project. The work group report describes the origins and gives examples in Appendix B.

### Outcomes

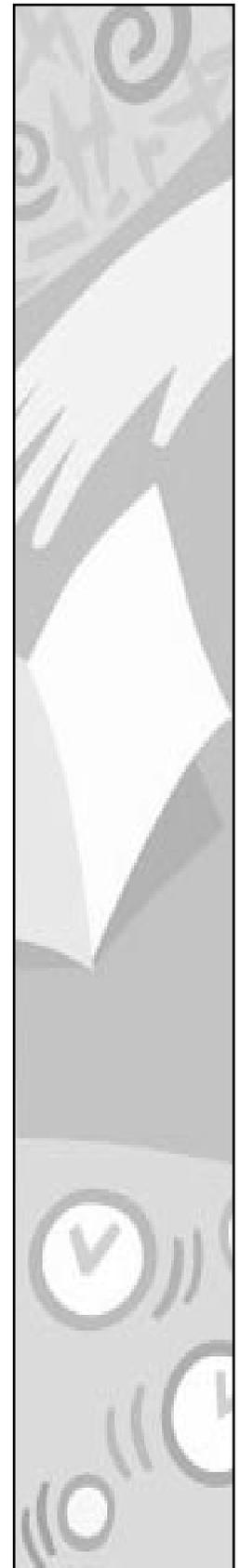
The Outcomes Work Group developed a list and general description of positive outcomes most likely to be related to these critical elements. These include the following: communication, conflict resolution, critical thinking, decision making, goal setting and planning, social/environmental navigation, personal safety, problem solving, relationships, social responsibility (e.g., leadership and citizenship/community service), subject matter knowledge and skills, and valuing diversity (*see Appendix C for the Outcomes work group report*).

### Current Efforts

Concurrently, a report was generated by the Current Efforts Work Group (*see Appendix D*) to describe other sources of data about 4-H youth. Particular attention was given to national education surveys.

### Methods

In July 1998, members of the Methods Work Group met to draft the sampling design and survey instruments. The team members referred to the



Critical Elements and Conceptual Outcomes documents from the first two work groups. The Methods Work Group members also considered other 4-H and extension surveys (e.g., *Children, Youth and Families At Risk–CYFAR–reports, New York Members Only Club Survey, Iowa Survey, Kansas Survey, New Mexico and others*) as well as non-4-H surveys (e.g., *Boys & Girls Club, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Girl Scouts, and others*). Based on ideas from all these sources, many sample items were written for each critical element category and the items were ranked with the top 5-10 in each category used to draft the pilot instruments (see *Appendix E for the Methods work group report*).

### **Pre-pilot**

Arizona and Missouri helped develop the facilitated process and pre-piloted the process and the surveys with groups representing the four ES-237 programming units. Feedback came from the Arizona and Missouri youth groups. Also, National Association for Extension 4-H Agents (NAE4-HA) '98 workshop participants provided detailed suggestions for improvement of the surveys. After changes were made, the Pilot Phase was started in December 1998.

### **Pilot Study**

The primary purpose of the “Pilot Study” was to provide enough data to fine tune the survey instrument. A secondary purpose of the pilot phase was to try out the sampling process and to learn enough about the assessment effort to write a detailed “Instruction Packet” that would accompany the national data collection effort. For the pilot phase, two states from each of the four regions (Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, North Dakota, Georgia, Texas, Oregon and Idaho) and two counties from each state were randomly selected to survey participants from each of three program areas (clubs, special interest and school enrichment). Both rural and urban counties were included. After-school child care programs were selected from states that offered these programs. Each county was instructed to randomly select programs to be surveyed. Adults connected to the groups being surveyed were asked to complete the adult survey instrument. A total of 1300 surveys were sent to participating states and about 480 completed youth and 190 adult surveys were returned. Due to the need to complete the pilot process in time for national data collection, the pilot was conducted at an awkward time of year (winter). An additional number of completed surveys could not be used due to lack of written consent. Since active consent was a required part of the process, we could not accept surveys submitted without proof of parental consent.

### **National Data Collection**

Modifications were made to the instruction packets and surveys (*see Appendix F for a sample of the instruction packet*). A national training session was held in Kansas City, Missouri, in March 1999 to introduce the process to participating and interested states. In June of 1999, packets were mailed to randomly selected states (three from each of the four regions) containing the revised surveys as well as consent forms, directions for human subjects proposal submission, and other details in the instruction packets.

Difficulties encountered with data collection included the following: obtaining parental consent, access to students in school enrichment programs, lack of identity with 4-H (for some students in “non-traditional” programs) which potentially decreased motivation for completing the process, lack of accurate enrollment data, confusion for some regarding ES-237 reporting categories, and the sheer amount of time and energy it takes for local agents to complete such a task. The deadline for states to turn in completed surveys was extended in order to obtain numbers of completed surveys closer to the original target numbers.

### **National Data Collection Sampling Design**

As in the pilot phase, states were randomly selected from each region and counties were randomly selected to survey youth. For clubs, special interest, and school enrichment programs, three states were selected from each region. For after-school child care projects, states with the highest enrollment from each region were asked to collect surveys. The numbers of surveys to be completed by each county and state were determined proportionately. That is, states with greater enrollment numbers were asked to collect more surveys. For example, total numbers requested from the Western Region were fewer than for the Southern Region, but were in proportion to national enrollment figures.

The two versions of the questionnaires (youth and adult) covered the same topics, but the items were rewritten for the adults (e.g., a youth statement would sometimes include personal referents such as “I” and “me,” where the adult versions would always say something like “Children in 4-H....”). In the results section below, we use examples exclusively from the youth surveys but offer response rates from the adult surveys when appropriate. See Appendix G for a report on the validity and reliability of the survey data. Appendices H and I list the detailed results reported in summary below. (*Note that due to rounding error, not all percentages will add to 100%.*)

The statistical procedure used to analyze the data for the National 4-H Impact Study was Multiple Classification Analysis. Multiple Classification

Analysis is a statistical procedure that shows the effect of several independent variables on a single dependent variable. It is similar to the more common multiple regression procedure but does not require the same assumptions and allows for non-continuous independent variables.

For more discussion of the procedure see Andrews, Morgan, Sonquist and Klem, 1973. Andrews, Frank, James Morgan, John Sonquist, and Laura Klem, 1973 Multiple Classification Analysis. Institute for Social Research. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan. For a description of how to calculate an MCA, see the Methods Work Group Report (Appendix E).

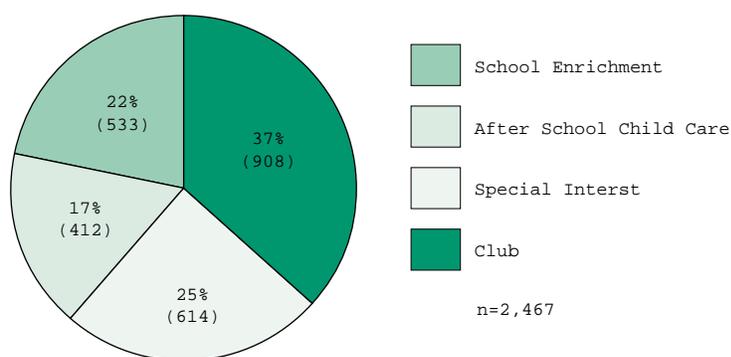
## Results

### Respondent Characteristics (Youth)

The youth who responded were on average 11-12 years of age, in the 6th grade, mostly female (59% vs. 41% male) and white (78% vs. 8% African American, 3% Hispanic, 5% Native American, 2% Asian American and 5% other). These percentages are close to 1998 National 4-H enrollment figures. Although the majority of the youth had friends who were “mostly the same ethnic background” (58%), a significant number have “friends of mixed ethnic background” (35%). Most of the youth lived with two parents (73%), although one quarter reported other living arrangements (25% which included 8% who lived with one parent and one step parent, 8% who lived only with their mother, and 2% who lived with their grandparents). These percentages are not dissimilar from national U.S. census data which report that 69% of youth under 18 years live with two parents and 27% live with one parent.

On average, the surveyed youth had been in some kind of 4-H program for about 1-2 years (the range of length of time in the program was from less than 6 months to over 6 years). Most of the youth reported living in rural areas (31.9% rural and 25% rural non-farm). However, the sample did include 11% who lived in metropolitan cities over 50,000 and 15% who reported living in cities between 10,000 and 50,000. National 4-H demographics from 1998 reported that 44% lived on farms or in towns less than 10,000, 24% lived in metropolitan cities over 50,000 and 23% lived in cities between 10,000 and 50,000.

The programs with completed youth surveys included the following:



Clearly, there was an over representation of clubs, perhaps because these are programs in which parental consent was the easiest to obtain. Many special interest programs are only offered in the summer and school enrichment programs usually require intense advanced planning in order to include time to complete surveys and to expedite a good relationship with school personnel

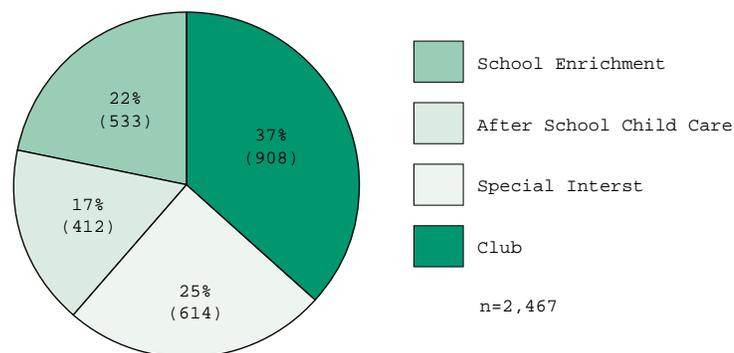


which can increase buy-in by parents and, therefore, a better return rate for permission forms.

Responses to the breadth of program experience questions showed that the majority of these youth participated in a variety of 4-H activities and were not limited to the delivery mode where they completed the surveys. This is important because it indicates that their perceptions of 4-H were likely formed from more than one experience with the program.

**Respondent Characteristics (Adults)**

Of the 471 adults who completed the surveys, 84% were parents of a child who participated in 4-H. Almost 56% were adult volunteers with 4-H and 13% were staff members with 4-H responsibilities. Almost half (46%) were involved as children in 4-H. The vast majority were female (78%) and white (87%) of an average age of 40 years. Most of the respondents had two or more children in school grades K-12. As with the youth, over half of the adult respondents came from a rural area (54%). A smaller percentage of adult respondents came from communities greater than 10,000 (10% live in a metropolitan city over 50,000, 8% in cities between 10,000 and 50,000). The types of delivery modes for completed adult surveys follows:



Apparently, access to adults, particularly mothers, is easiest in club programs. This is consistent with the numbers of completed surveys from the youth. If adults were not present before, during, or after the program, it was harder to recruit their help in completing surveys. The youth typically completed surveys during a scheduled meeting. Some of the parent surveys were sent home, thus requiring additional follow-up on the part of the county agents or other volunteers who administered the survey.

**Building on the Strengths of the 4-H Program:  
Descriptive Data**

In general, youth and adults are very positive about 4-H and specific aspects of the programs. The vast majority (90% or more) agree or strongly

agree with statements such as the following: “4-H teaches me to be responsible for my actions” and “4-H teaches me to help other people.” However, certain elements stand out as being particular strengths of 4-H, as revealed by some of the descriptive data from the surveys.

**Belonging in 4-H** includes a set of items related to the critical element, an **“Inclusive Environment.”** Responses for most of the items were positive (over 80% of the youth agreeing with most of the items). The strongest responses came from the following statements:

### Belonging in 4-H

	Youth	Adult
"All kinds of kids are welcome in 4-H."	97(57)	97(50)
"Both girls and boys can be leaders in 4-H."	94(56)	99(58)
"Boys and girls have equal chances to do everything in 4-H."	92(47)	98(45)
"I feel like I belong in 4-H."	89(42)	97(32)
"4-H helps me accept differences in others."	90(33)	98(31)

(Strongly Agree + Agree percentages are reported first with Strongly Agree percentages in parentheses)

Youth who have participated in 4-H activities have a strong sense of belonging and feel that all types of youth are welcome. Furthermore, they see 4-H as an egalitarian experience where both boys and girls can be involved and be leaders and where they learn to accept differences in others.

**The Feelings about 4-H** section of survey questions covers items related to the critical elements of **“Feeling Emotionally and Physically Safe.”** Again, the majority of youth feel safe in 4-H activities (most of the responses were 84% and above). In particular, high positive responses occurred for the following items:

### Feelings about 4-H

	Youth	Adult
"I feel good during 4-H activities."	94(42)	99(34)
"I feel safe when I do 4-H activities."	93(41)	99(32)
"In 4-H I feel that it is safe to try new things."	94(40)	98(24)

(Strongly Agree + Agree percentages are reported first with Strongly Agree percentages in parentheses)

*Adults in 4-H* and adult-youth partnerships form a core relationship in many 4-H programs. Youth noted particular strengths related to the critical element “*Positive Relationship with a Caring Adult*” by their responses to such items as the following:

***Adults in 4-H***

	Youth	Adult
"Adults in 4-H expect me to respect the feelings and property of others."	97(45)	99(54)
"Adults in 4-H help me to work with others as a team."	91(39)	98(39)
"Adults in 4-H make me feel good about myself."	90(35)	98(30)

*(Strongly Agree + Agree percentages are reported first with Strongly Agree percentages in parentheses)*

Overall, adult responses to the survey items are even more glowing than the youth responses. It seems that adults who have children in 4-H or have volunteered themselves in 4-H view the experiences very positively. These perceptions become particularly interesting and useful to note and are discussed more fully in a later section of this report (see also Appendices H and I for more details of the full set of descriptive data).

**Results from the Multiple Classification Analysis**

***Youth Sample***

Below is an overview of the Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) for each section of the survey. Items in the survey were grouped into a single scale for each Critical Element (see Appendices K and L for details). The scores (or ratings) in the tables (Appendices K and L) are the means for the scales. Only the statistically significant variables will be discussed. In the passages that follow, the terms “scores” and “ratings” both refer to the means. “Significant differences” indicate that given certain conditions (e.g., Age, Gender, Region, etc.), ratings or scores on the critical element might differ to an extent greater than one would expect by chance alone.

First, significant differences will be noted for each of the critical element sections of the survey. In general, the consistently significant variables involved Age (younger participants tended to have higher ratings), Gender (females tended to report higher ratings), Region (scores from the Eastern and Western regions tended to be higher than the other regions), Length of Time in Program (the longer a youth reported being in 4-H, the higher the ratings), and Program Type. Clubs, Special Interest and School

Enrichment programs tended to rate items higher on the critical elements of Helping Others, Planning and Decision Making, and Belonging. Overall, after-school program ratings tended to be lower, although not drastically. A discussion of these trends is included at the end of this section.

### ***Adults in 4-H***

The region, age, ethnicity and gender and program type had significant influence in this survey section. Respondents from the Western and Eastern regions reported the highest scores, followed by the Southern and Central regions. Younger respondents reported higher scores than older respondents. Caucasian respondents reported higher ratings than non-caucasians. Finally, special interest scores were the highest followed by clubs/school enrichment and then after-school programs.

### ***Feelings About 4-H***

Region, age and gender were the only significant variables related to Feelings About 4-H. Region had the greatest influence, followed by age and gender. The Eastern and Western regions had the highest scores, followed by the Southern and Central regions. Consistent with the other results where age was significant, the younger respondents had the highest scores and the 13-14 year-olds had the lowest. Females had higher scores than males.

### ***Learning in 4-H***

All variables were significant except for residence and ethnicity. Age provided the greatest influence (13-14 year-olds had lower ratings than the other age groups and younger respondents had higher scores than older respondents) followed by years in 4-H, gender and program type. The longer respondents had been in 4-H, the higher the scores in general. Females again had higher scores than males. School enrichment, clubs and special interest were equally high and after-school programs were lower than the others.

### ***Helping Others***

Residence was the only non-significant variable. Type of program was the most influential. Clubs and special interest programs had the highest scores, followed by school enrichment and after-school programs. Gender and age were also significant. Females had higher scores than males. Young respondents had higher scores than older ones although 13-14 year olds again had the lowest scores. The longer respondents had been in 4-H, the higher the scores. The Eastern and Western regions had higher scores than the others. Caucasians reported higher ratings than others.

### ***Planning and Decision Making in 4-H***

Age of respondent, gender, and region were the only significant variables in this section. As before younger respondents had higher scores than older respondents and 13-14 year-olds had the lowest scores. Females had higher scores than males. The Western region's ratings were higher than the others.

### ***Belonging in 4-H***

Region and age showed the greatest differences followed by gender, program type and residence. The Eastern and Western regions had the highest scores, followed by the Southern and Central regions in that order. Once again younger respondents had higher scores than older respondents. Females again had higher scores than males. Clubs, special interest, and school enrichment programs had about the same scores. After-school programs were lower. This is the only section where residence made a difference. Youth from more rural areas had slightly higher ratings of belonging than more populated areas.

### ***Adult Sample***

Fewer significant results were in the analysis of adult responses due to the smaller number of adults in the sample. Obvious relationships will be discussed regardless of their statistical significance.

### ***Adults in 4-H***

Region and program type were the only significant variables in this section. The Southern and Eastern region respondents had the highest scores. Adults associated with school enrichment programs had the highest scores followed by those associated with clubs and after-school programs.

### ***Feelings About 4-H***

4-H programmatic region had the greatest impact on this scale followed by age of respondent, program type and years in 4-H. The highest scores came again from the Eastern and Southern regions. School enrichment programs had the highest scores, followed by clubs and special interest/after-school programs. Respondents younger than thirty years and between age 41-45 years had the highest scores. Those involved in the program for 4-10 years had the highest scores.

### ***Learning in 4-H***

Age of respondent, number of years in 4-H and program type were significant variables in this section. The longer the involvement the higher

the score. School enrichment scores were the highest followed by after-school programs, clubs and special interest. The youngest (less than 30) and those in the age 41-46 year range had the highest scores, compared to other age groups.

### ***Helping Others***

Age was the only significant variable, with a similar pattern (the youngest and those in the age 41-46 year range had the highest scores).

### ***Planning and Decision Making in 4-H***

Type of program was the only significant variable in this section. After school and school enrichment programs had the highest scores.

### ***Belonging in 4-H***

Age of respondent and number of years in 4-H were the significant variables in this section. The Southern and Eastern regions had the highest ratings while the Central region reported the lowest ratings. The youngest and those age 41-45 years had the highest scores. The longer the involvement in 4-H, the higher the scores.

## ***A Discussion of the Results of the MCA***

### ***Age:***

Younger participants are more positive about their 4-H experiences overall than are older youth. Perhaps the younger participants value a positive relationship with a caring adult more than do older, more mature youth. Alternatively, the kind of relationship with an adult available in 4-H is more satisfying to younger youth than to older ones. It is possible that older youth have more other opportunities (outside 4-H) for maintaining a positive relationship with a caring adult. Emotional and physical safety is in all likelihood more of a concern for younger, less mature and independent youth.

It may be somewhat more difficult to explain the fact that younger participants valued more highly the opportunities to help others that 4-H makes available. Perhaps this is true because many 4-H delivery modes involve a cross section of youth ages and the helping opportunities 4-H chooses are more appropriate to the developmental levels of the younger participants. Older youth probably have more choices available to them (outside 4-H) in ways they can help others.

If 4-H makes essentially the same planning and decision making opportunities available to youth of all ages, the older youth are less likely to be satisfied with that level of involvement. They expect continuous

*Younger participants are more positive about their 4-H experiences overall than are older youth.*

expansion in the responsibilities available to them. Some volunteer leaders may find it difficult to relinquish their authority to the degree teens would prefer.

For a very young participant, the opportunity to identify with belonging to an organization is probably a new, and very special experience, particularly if the organization includes older youth. For an older participant, who in all likelihood has had many such opportunities, it is less valued.

The 13-14 year-old group is problematic. Apparently, many of the 13-14 year-olds in this study were beginning to question 4-H as a satisfying opportunity for learning, for helping others, and as an opportunity for participating in planning and decision making.

This is the adolescent age during which participation in 4-H declines most precipitously. Other competing opportunities for school-related and other activities open up to them. They are changing rapidly, and anxious to take on an adult role. Continuing to do in 4-H what they have already done for several years has little appeal. Those who perceive themselves as having succeeded and been recognized in 4-H are more likely to continue their involvement in 4-H.

Folk wisdom in 4-H circles has it that youth who make a transition in their 4-H experience at this age into a new, different and wider set of opportunities (often involving leadership) are very likely to stay in 4-H throughout high school. Retention of 13-14 year-olds by helping them make this transition is critically important to strengthening 4-H and deserving of serious attention.

***Gender:***

Overall, girls are more satisfied with their participation in 4-H than are boys, as evidenced by their tendency to report higher ratings overall, and in every section of the instrument. At least one possibility could explain the differential evaluation of the 4-H experience by the sexes. The way the program is actually operated could be more appealing to girls than to boys. Since both the cadre of volunteers who lead the 4-H program and the professional staff who manage it are predominantly female, it is reasonable to assume that the 4-H experience is likely to be appealing to girls. This notion is borne out by the consistently larger enrollment of girls in nearly all states, for nearly all years. If this is in fact true, and if the intent is to equalize the participation in 4-H by both sexes, then more attention needs to be given to the kinds of opportunities and operating procedures that will prove equally appealing to boys.

***Delivery Mode:***

Although there is considerable interest in examining the differences in youths' perceptions of their 4-H experiences between delivery modes, using this data for such comparisons may not be appropriate. Respondents were selected for the study based on participation in a particular 4-H delivery mode. These included clubs, special interest groups, school enrichment programs and after-school programs. However, in response to the question on breadth of 4-H program experiences, a majority of youth respondents indicated that they have participated in a variety of 4-H activities, not limited to the delivery mode to which they were assigned. This suggests that their perceptions of their 4-H experience were likely influenced by more than one source of experience or delivery mode within the 4-H program, thus making it difficult to interpret the differences reported by delivery mode. As more discriminating statistical analysis are employed with this data, it may be possible to control some of the variables and tease out differences between delivery modes. Future studies will also need to address this issue, particularly in light of interest in determining whether outcomes vary between delivery modes.

***Length of Time in Program:***

Overall, the longer a youth reports being in 4-H, the higher the ratings. That was true specifically for the Learning in 4-H component; and for Helping Others. These results can probably be explained by the fact that a significant proportion of young people have a single experience in 4-H, and then do not re-enroll. Those who really like it, and perceive that they have benefitted continue to participate. Those who don't like it drop out.

***Ethnicity:***

Very little difference was attributable to ethnicity of the participants. Caucasian participants reported higher ratings than non-caucasian on Adults in 4-H. They also reported higher scores on Helping Others. No other differences by race were noted.

Participation in 4-H by racial and ethnic minority groups is disproportionately concentrated in School Enrichment. School Enrichment very frequently uses the classroom teacher as the presenter of the 4-H curricula: hence, school enrichment participants view them as their "Adult in 4-H." The teacher-student relationship is more authoritarian than the usual volunteer 4-H leader, and perhaps is viewed very differently. Opportunities to help others are probably not available to youth in 4-H School Enrichment to the same degree that they are to participants in the other delivery modes.

***Region:***

Overall, scores from the Eastern and Western regions tended to be higher than the other regions. 4-H programs differ greatly, not only by delivery mode and program content, but by policies, practices and traditions of the various states. Clearly, some of these unmeasured factors which are in operation in the Western and Eastern regions result in greater satisfaction with the 4-H program on the part of participants from those regions. Since the 4-H programs in those two regions are generally quite different, one could speculate that the specific factors leading to higher satisfaction of participants are likely different for the regions, and even for the states within each of the regions.

There is a fertile opportunity for further research in identifying the policies, practices and traditions which are common to 4-H in states of the Western and Eastern regions, but different from those of the Central and Southern region. Potentially, some policies, practices and traditions could be identified which appear to lead to enhanced participant satisfaction with the 4-H program. This could prove important to strengthening the 4-H program in all states.

***Responses from the Open-Ended Question***

***“How Has 4-H Changed Your Life?”***

***Youth Responses:***

*(n=1,505 or 61% of the total who completed the survey)*

Open-ended responses to the question “How has 4-H Changed Your Life?” were coded as categories related to the outcomes addressed by the work group and other outcomes projects in 4-H and as descriptors included in the actual responses. The codes used were as follows:



<b>CODE</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>+</b>	Positive Statement	<i>positive tone to entire answer</i>
<b>-</b>	Negative Statement	<i>negative tone to entire answer</i>
<b>0</b>	Neutral	<i>not able to gauge as positive or negative</i>
<b>M</b>	Mixed Statement	<i>both positive and negative things mentioned</i>
<b>S</b>	Self	<i>adult writes of benefit to self</i>
<b>O</b>	Other	<i>adult writes of benefit to others (i.e. children)</i>
<b>\$</b>	Material Things	<i>"money, financial, ribbons, awards"</i>
<b>A</b>	Activity	<i>"activities, something to do, opportunities, doing things, more involved, keeping busy, show"</i>
<b>AD</b>	Accepting Differences	<i>"differences, different people, diversity"</i>
<b>C</b>	Communication	<i>"communication, speaking skills, teaching others"</i>
<b>CR</b>	Conflict Resolution	<i>solving violence</i>
<b>CS</b>	Community Service	<i>"helping others, community, volunteering"</i>
<b>CT</b>	Critical Thinking	<i>judging</i>
<b>DM</b>	Decision Making	<i>decisions</i>
<b>E</b>	Engagement	<i>"enjoy, fun, like, love"</i>
<b>F</b>	Friends	<i>"friends, new people"</i>
<b>GSP</b>	Goal Setting & Planning	<i>"managing, goals, planning, future"</i>
<b>HL</b>	Healthy Lifestyle Choices	<i>eating the right foods</i>
<b>KAS</b>	Knowledge, Attitude & Skills	<i>"caring, values"</i>
<b>KS</b>	Knowledge & Skills	<i>"learned, how to..., academics"</i>
<b>L</b>	Leadership	<i>"leader, lead"</i>
<b>PS</b>	Problem Solving	<i>problem solving</i>
<b>QT</b>	Quality Time	<i>spending time with family</i>
<b>R</b>	Relationship	<i>"relationships, getting along with other, teamwork"</i>
<b>S</b>	Safety	<i>safe</i>
<b>SR</b>	Self Responsibility	<i>"responsible, independence"</i>
<b>SWB</b>	Self/Well Being	<i>"self-esteem, better person, nicer person, less shy"</i>
<b>UM</b>	Useful Marketable Skills	<i>"babysitting, successful business, college major"</i>
<b>WR</b>	Wise Use of Resources	<i>"managing money, good buying choices"</i>
<b>O</b>	Other	<i>Other outcomes not listed above (e.g., better snacks, grades, homework, environment, opened many doors, keeps me on my toes, helps me)</i>

Overwhelmingly positive remarks (92% of those responding to the question) focused on several outcomes of the 4-H experience. The top 10 categories reported by the youth are as follows:

1. Knowledge and skill
2. Self/Well-being
3. Friends
4. Self Responsibility
5. Activity
6. Other
7. Relationships
8. Engagement
9. Community Service
10. Leadership

These outcome categories are not dissimilar from other reports. For example, a recent survey of 4-H alumni in Nebraska (Fox & Gerdes, 2000) indicated that more than 90% of the respondents reported responsibility, self-confidence, a greater respect for others, leadership and relationship building skills as the greatest life skills they learned in 4-H.

Many youth here describe specific knowledge and skills related to their projects such as raising and caring for animals, cooking, sewing, babysitting, arts and crafts, agriculture and plants. Broader life skills such as decision making and problem solving are also mentioned though less frequently. For some students, the 4-H experience allows them to finish their school work, improve their grades and spend more quality time with their families. The following two quotes from youth respondents express this view:

*4-H has changed my life by teaching me about different animals and activities. Also, it lets me make choices on my own and make new friends. It teaches my to work in groups and have fun. It has given me responsibility, independence, courage, and helped me in speaking in front of people. That's what 4-H teaches me.*

*I'm doing better in school.*

*I'm doing  
better in  
school.*

Many youth felt changed in fundamental, personal ways. In addition to learning new things, quite a few claimed they were “nicer” people, “less shy,” “more confident,” and noted other such personal improvements. Several wrote that “I’m a better person” for having been in 4-H. The following quote is illustrative of these type of responses:

*4-H has taught me responsibility and dedication. The people I have met in 4-H have and continue to inspire me to do my best and to continue growing. I've learned that I want to devote my life to learning, meeting new people, and helping others. 4-H has made me more aware of who I am, and I am able to say I am proud of the person I am, a great deal due to 4-H!*

Many youth credit 4-H for improved relationships with friends, family and others. They mention learning such things as “getting along” and “working with others.” They use words like “respect,” “patience,” and “teamwork.” Several mentioned specifically that 4-H teaches about others who are different from them. For example, one of the youth said the following:

*Learned about goals/goal setting, leadership, citizenship, life skills. It has made me an all around better person that is responsible, optimistic, and artistic. 4-H allows people from all different backgrounds to shine.*

Quite a few youth simply enjoyed the engagement of fun activities, meeting new friends and people, traveling and the experience of fair (whether it be showing animals, winning ribbons, selling their animals or presenting their accomplishments.)

Of the 8% who did not write a positive statement, about 3% are considered “neutral” in that they did not clearly indicate a value (e.g., “Have to get up early to feed animals.” Or “I’m not in 4-H”). The remaining 5% made clearly negative statements such as “it has not changed my life” or something more specific. A few comments, such as this one, contained clear suggestions for improvement:

*Not much, is a very unorganized program, time management is way down there. Record books teach you nothing more than to hate 4-H. Huge time waster. Things never start on time (including state and county shows). Please change management.*

Some other comments gave hints about deeper problems that would not be easily resolved as a result of a simple evaluation:

*I have learned that 4-H is as unfair as school and other club activities. It has helped me to realize that I have to set goals for myself, do my absolute best and be proud of myself... because more than likely my personal praise is all I will receive. And I have learned that morals and*

*values aren't important to anyone but me. Even the adults and extension agents have no morals. I have to set my own standards.*

Other comments were consistent with the results from the closed-ended questions:

*It hasn't changed my life that much outside of 4-H. I know how to do things in 4-H but all of my friends are not from 4-H.*

Some of the negative statements were “mixed” in that they also included some seemingly positive notions (e.g., “4-H hasn't really changed my life, expect to help me learn more about myself from the true colors program.”). A more specific example of a “mixed” comment follows:

*4-H has become the center of my heart, my pride. It has shown me how to do work in order to receive and earn rewards. It has taught me all about farming and getting to know my animals better. There has also been a downside to 4-H. I have learned that people you thought were your friends show their true evils and jealousy. I think our 4-H club needs to stop the bullies and teach each of us children how to be respectful to one another.*

The typical response to the survey question was only one line or so with one or two “outcomes” included (e.g., “I do community service and I help other people.” Or “I have become more responsible.”). A particularly long answer sums up most of the other comments:

*Looking back over the past nine years, I have attended State 4-H Convention four different years. I have given over twenty-five speeches. I have given workshops from soybean conservation to conducting parliamentary procedure and have attended over one hundred workshops. Not to mention, the endless hours I put into community service for the (name deleted) Community Center, the Salvation Army, to the Kiddie Park and even our local park. I have held leadership from vice-president to song leader and even recreation leader on some occasions. I have raised animals. I have gone to state on judging teams and I am currently waiting to go to Denver for my many years of record books. I have taken time in cooking and sewing along with taking care of small children at 4-H Day Camp. And of all these things I have achieved, I have gained leadership, citizenship, community service, many awards, trips and even medals. Through all the time I have devoted to 4-H, I have become a more*

*responsible person, and through this long and often tedious walk, I have pushed myself to make my best even better.*

**Adult Responses:**

Of 471 adults surveyed, 249 responded to the open-ended question. As with the youth, adults comments were very positive (94% and less than 1% were negative). Because many of the adults had been in 4-H themselves, their comments included changes both for themselves and for youth (e.g., 85% of comments mentioned self and 40% mentioned other). Adults tended to write longer responses and mentioned several aspects of change in each response. Adults had nearly the same “top 10” outcome categories as the youth, although the relative frequencies were different:

1. Knowledge & Skills
2. Activity
3. Relationships
4. Community Service
5. Self/Well Being
6. Leadership
7. Self Responsibility
8. Friends
9. Communication
10. Other

Adults mentioned communication as an outcome more often than the youth and did not relate the “fun” part of 4-H in quite the same way. This is consistent with other reports (e.g., Vos & Baum, 2000) where the majority of adults believe that their children have applied life skills learned in 4-H projects in other real life situations.

Examples of the positive comments include the following:

*I have found out that young people can learn to be strong leaders and quality citizens through participation in 4-H. No other youth group gives them the multitude of opportunities that 4-H offers. 4-H has offered our family the chance to work on projects together. It has particularly given my daughter the chance to do things with her father and grandfather.*

*4-H has accepted my family including a child with cerebral palsy. He has always been treated with respect and encouraged to participate to his full potential. It's great to be a part of something that has a wholesome community-centered focus.*

*I have found out that young people can learn to be strong leaders and quality citizens through participation in 4-H.*

*4-H has been a wonderful activity for me to do volunteer work as a college student with a busy schedule. Volunteering my time with students in an after school 4-H program, not only makes me feel good, but helps me use my spare time resourcefully by helping children become positive members of their community, effective leaders and educated in manners of people. Not only may these kids be getting attention they don't get at home, they are also learning skills that will help them grow to use effective decision making and be active in activities they may not have previously been exposed to.*

Adult Mixed/neutral comments included the following:

*I'm busier!*

*I have a scouting background. 4-H requires more independent learning and less group learning. I also feel 4-H requires more parental involvement if the child is to be successful, since most activities have to be learned at home and not in workshop environments.*

*I need to write a comment on the paperwork in 4-H. We write duplicates on many forms, often the paperwork is overwhelming to fill out. I believe the paperwork needs to be streamlined and decreased. I learned to sew in 4-H. I also attended judging schools and county fairs. I look back on 4-H activities with great fondness.*

*I have more respect for the abilities of young kids and the difference they can make in their communities. I am overwhelmed by the scope of 4-H and my role in leading kids with such diverse interests. I have learned how important it is to consistently communicate with the youth in my group and how hard it can be to keep everyone informed. I am appalled at how some kids have no support from their parents even in learning life skills. I appreciate the relationship that I have with my own children.*

Although a clear minority of the responses, an example of the adult's negative comments include this one that echoes an example from the youth comments:

*My experience with 4-H lately is different than it used to be. It is more of a checkbook competition. Livestock is purchased shortly*